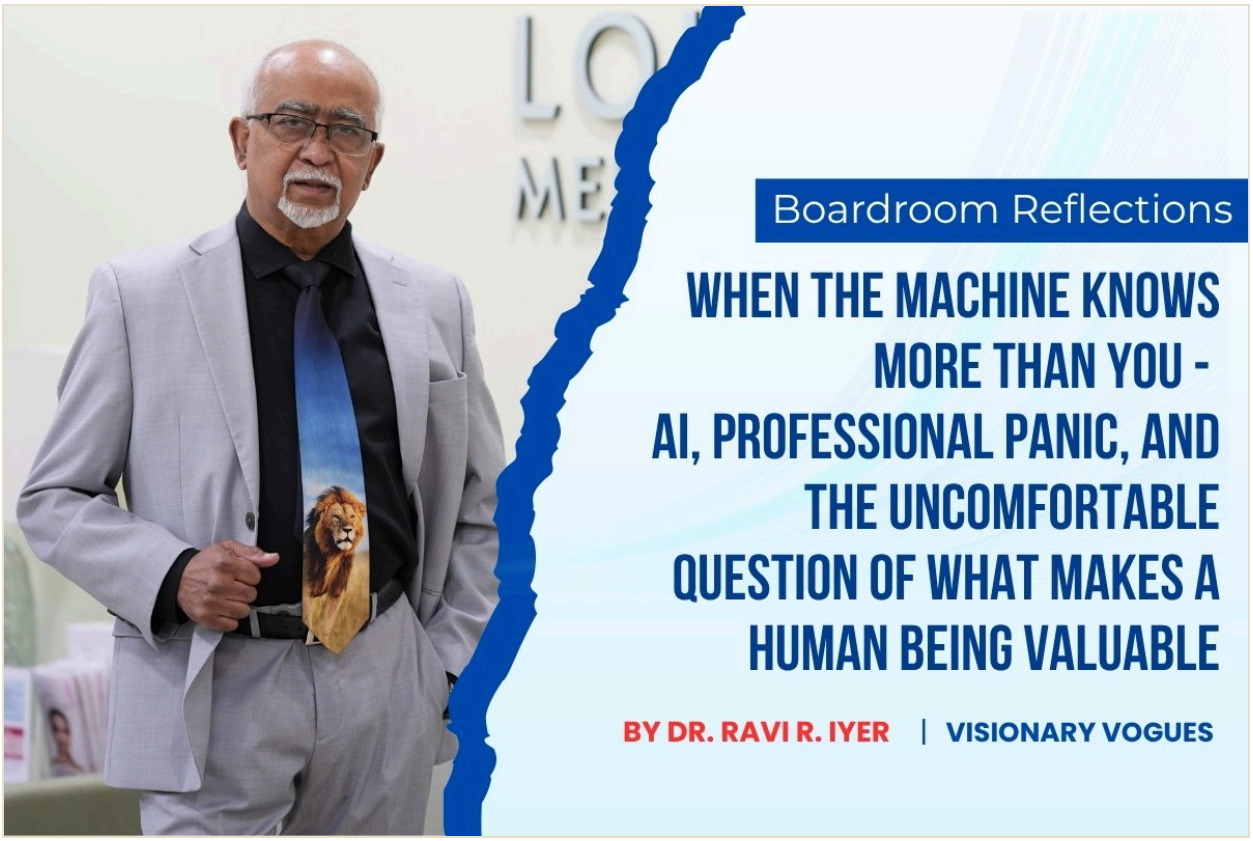
PUBLISHED IN **Visionary Vogues** · Magazine column · web
PUBLISHED October 2026
Month as recorded by the author; no day is printed on the published page.
AUTHOR Ravi R. Iyer, MD
SOURCE https://visionaryvogues.com/human-intelligence-in-ai-age
RECORDED 23 November 2026 · record AR-2026-10-005

ESSAY

When the Machine Knows More Than You

AI, professional panic, and the uncomfortable question of what makes a human being valuable.

By **Ravi R. Iyer, MD**



Key art as published by Visionary Vogues. Retained as part of the record of how the piece appeared.

There is something fascinating happening in medicine. Artificial intelligence has arrived. And some very accomplished physicians are terrified. These are men and women who have spent ten, twenty, thirty years acquiring knowledge. They survived

medical school, residency, fellowship, board examinations, sleepless nights, impossible call schedules, and decades of clinical practice.

They accumulated enormous stores of information. Then a machine appeared that could consume more medical literature than any physician could read in a lifetime, interrogate enormous datasets, recognize patterns across disciplines, and retrieve information in seconds. And suddenly the question became:

What happens to me?

Will AI replace the physician? The lawyer? The accountant? The programmer? The professor? The analyst? The writer?

Perhaps..... Perhaps not.

But I increasingly think that is the less interesting question. The more interesting question is:

Why does the possibility frighten us so much?

Because our reaction to artificial intelligence may be revealing something uncomfortable about human intelligence. It may be revealing how poorly many of us understand the value we actually bring to the world.

We Mistook What We Do for Who We Are

For generations, we built professional identity around scarcity. The physician knew things the patient did not know. The lawyer understood statutes the client did not understand. The professor possessed knowledge the student did not possess. The analyst had access to information the public could not easily obtain.

Knowledge created asymmetry. And asymmetry created value. Entire professions were constructed around it. Then came the internet. Then search. Then smartphones. And now artificial intelligence.

Information, once scarce, became abundant. Knowledge, once difficult to retrieve, became instantly accessible. And increasingly, even sophisticated analysis is becoming inexpensive. That is profoundly destabilizing if your identity was constructed around being the person who knows.

But perhaps the machine is not destroying our value. Perhaps it is exposing that we misunderstood where our value lived in the first place.

The Quiet Terror of Being Found Out

Behind much professional accomplishment lives an anxiety we rarely discuss.

- What if I am not actually as good as everyone thinks I am?
- What if somebody discovers that I don't know the answer?
- What if the expertise on which I built my identity turns out not to
- be particularly extraordinary?

Psychology has given part of this experience a familiar name: impostor phenomenon. But I suspect something broader is happening. Many people have spent their lives accumulating credentials without ever developing clarity about purpose.

> They have résumés, titles, positions, and accomplishments.
> But ask the much more fundamental question -
> What is your life actually about?
> And the room becomes strangely quiet.

- Most human beings are extraordinarily busy. Far fewer are
- intentional.

We wake up. We answer messages. We attend meetings. We solve problems. We earn money. We accumulate possessions. We defend our positions. We go home exhausted. Then we wake up and do it again.

- Existence becomes an endless series of transactions
- masquerading as a life and we survive with remarkable
- efficiency.

- But survival and thriving are not the same thing. And then AI
- arrives and threatens to perform some of those transactions
- better than we do. The resulting panic may therefore have
- surprisingly little to do with technology.

It may be an identity crisis disguised as a technology crisis.

The ME and NOT-ME World

- There is another layer. Much of modern life operates inside what
- I call the ME and NOT-ME world. There is me. And there is
- everything that is not me.

- My career. My company. My reputation. My department. My
- patients. My market share. My followers. My accomplishments.
- My ideas. My territory.

- Once reality is divided this way, life becomes fundamentally
- competitive. If someone else gains, perhaps I lose. If another
- physician becomes more capable, perhaps I become less
- valuable. If a machine becomes intelligent, perhaps my
- intelligence becomes less important.

- From this worldview, power means domination. Value means
- scarcity. Success means possession. And relevance means
- remaining difficult to replace.

These are profoundly transactional tools. And transactional tools are temporary. Eventually someone becomes faster. Someone becomes cheaper. Someone becomes younger. Or something arrives that can perform the transaction almost instantaneously.

- Artificial intelligence may simply be the most dramatic
- demonstration yet of the fragility of transactional identity.

Then a Frightened Man Walked Into My Office

A few days ago, something happened in my clinic that crystallized all of this for me. A patient came to see me after a complicated surgical illness. He was recovering well, but he had a problem that had become almost as frightening as the illness itself. Two surgeons were offering him two different interpretations of what should happen next.

- One essentially said:
- You are doing well. Allow the area to heal and observe.

The other raised the possibility of a residual anatomical problem that might cause trouble in the future and suggested further intervention. Both arguments sounded reasonable. Both came from surgeons. And the patient was trapped between them. He was frightened.

Now here is the important part.

I am not a surgeon. I could have protected myself behind that fact. I could have said, “This is outside my specialty. You need another surgical opinion.”

Instead, I pulled a chair up beside my desk. And I said: “Let's walk through this together. Let's go on a journey of discovery and find out what we actually know.”

And we began.

I had the operative information. I had the competing arguments. And sitting in front of me were extraordinarily powerful artificial-intelligence systems capable of interrogating medical literature and reasoning across a volume of information that would have taken me days to assemble manually.

So I used them. Not one. Several.

- I asked them to analyze the problem. I challenged their
- conclusions. I compared their reasoning. And interestingly, they
- did not initially agree. That itself was instructive.
- One interpretation made the future complication sound
- concerning. Another suggested the risk was substantially
- smaller. But when the actual operative details were introduced,
- something important happened.

The question changed.

The crucial issue was no longer the frightening name of a possible future complication. It was anatomy. What exactly had been done? What remained? Was there actually a closed structure capable of producing the complication being feared?

The operative report described a particular limited emergency procedure deliberately chosen because further dissection around critical structures had been considered dangerous. Once that information was incorporated, the theoretical debate became a much more precise anatomical problem. The analysis also showed why returning surgically to the same hostile anatomy was not itself a trivial proposition. Pages of surgical literature, competing interpretations, probabilities and AI-generated analysis eventually collapsed into essentially two human questions.

What anatomy actually remains, and does imaging demonstrate the structure being feared?

And was the remaining tissue treated in a manner likely to allow it to scar down rather than remain functionally active?

Those were questions his surgeon could answer. And those answers could transform the decision from speculation about what might happen into a discussion about what was actually present. That was ultimately where the analysis itself landed: characterize the residual anatomy, establish whether a discrete closed structure exists, identify residual material or collections, and clarify how the remaining tissue had been managed.

And then I watched something happen across my desk.

The man's face changed. The fear disappeared. Not because I had promised that nothing bad could happen. I hadn't.

Not because artificial intelligence had pronounced a verdict. It hadn't.

And certainly not because I had suddenly become a surgeon. I hadn't.

He became calm because something much more important had happened.

Uncertainty had acquired structure.

He understood the problem. He understood what was known. He understood what was not known. And most importantly, he understood what questions needed to be answered next. He walked into my office carrying other people's conflicting conclusions. He walked out carrying his own understanding.

The Machine Had Intelligence. The Human Restored Agency.

That distinction has stayed with me. Because several days later I read about Mira Murati, co-founder and CEO of Thinking Machines Lab , and discovered that some of the people building the next generation of artificial intelligence are wrestling with essentially the same question from the opposite direction.

Murati's concern is not simply how powerful AI can become. It is who remains in control of that power. Thinking Machines Lab is pursuing systems that can be customized around people's knowledge and continuously shaped through richer interaction with humans. Murati describes the objective as extending human agency rather than simply transferring it to machines.

That is a profound distinction. Because there are two very different futures hiding inside the phrase artificial intelligence. In one, we progressively surrender thinking to machines. The machine analyzes. The machine decides. The human complies. Efficiency increases while agency decreases.

But there is another possibility. The machine analyzes. The human interrogates. The machine discovers patterns. The human supplies context. The machine proposes possibilities. The human considers consequence. The machine expands the field of what can be known. And the human decides what is worth knowing and what should be done about it.

- Murati puts the principle succinctly: machines capable of
- thinking already exist; what they think about should remain a
- human choice. That is almost exactly what happened at my
- desk. The AI did not decide what mattered. We did.

The AI did not know why the man sitting beside me was frightened. I did. It did not decide that our objective was not merely to calculate a probability but to give this human being sufficient understanding to participate intelligently in a decision about his own body. We did.

It did not determine which assumptions deserved challenging. We did.

- It did not choose the questions he would carry back to his
- surgeon. We did.

The machine expanded our intelligence. The human encounter restored his agency.

And perhaps that distinction is much bigger than medicine.

The Future Is Not Human Versus Machine

We keep framing the AI debate as a competition. Human versus machine. Doctor versus algorithm. Writer versus language model. Programmer versus code generator. Teacher versus AI tutor. But perhaps that is another expression of the ME and NOT- ME world.

Competition is the only relationship we know how to imagine. Something else becoming powerful must therefore mean that I become weaker. But Murati's argument suggests another architecture entirely: systems designed around human participation, customization and continued steering rather than the wholesale surrender of agency. She acknowledges that some domains may indeed become highly automated, while arguing that much of the real world depends upon precisely the messy human participation that cannot simply be abstracted away.

- Medicine is nothing if not messy. Human beings are messy.
- Organizations are messy. Families are messy. Leadership is
- messy. Purpose is messy.
- And the consequential decisions of life rarely arrive as clean
- datasets with perfectly defined objective functions. They arrive
- as frightened men sitting across a desk.
- They arrive as incomplete information. Conflicting experts.
- Competing priorities. Uncertain futures. Values that cannot be
- reduced to probabilities.
- That is where intelligence becomes something larger than
- computation.

AI Did Not Replace the Physician in That Room

Think carefully about what happened. Artificial intelligence knew far more surgical literature than I did. That did not diminish me. It made me more useful. The machines retrieved. They compared. They calculated. They challenged assumptions. They exposed disagreements. They helped illuminate a piece of anatomy outside my own specialty.

But somebody still had to ask the right question. Somebody had to recognize when two apparently contradictory answers were actually based upon different assumptions. Somebody had to restore context. Somebody had to distinguish a theoretical possibility from a decision-relevant probability. Somebody had to recognize where the limits of an internist's expertise ended

and the surgeon's judgment needed to begin. And somebody had to sit beside a frightened human being and translate all of this into questions he could understand.

- That was my job. I did not compete with artificial intelligence
- that afternoon. I conducted it. And there, perhaps, lies the
- distinction we are missing.
- The physician of the future may not be the human being who
- can remember more than the machine. That competition is
- already becoming absurd.

The physician may instead be the person who can combine machine intelligence, human judgment, context, experience, curiosity and compassion into something neither human nor machine could produce alone.

The purpose was never to know more. The purpose was to help another human being see more clearly.

When Answers Become Abundant, Questions Become Precious

- That afternoon forced me to reconsider something. If I define my
- value as: “I am a physician because I possess medical
- knowledge,” AI is threatening.

But if I define my purpose differently, “I use everything available to me to help another human being move from confusion toward clarity, from illness toward health, and from fear toward agency”, AI becomes something entirely different. It becomes leverage.

The same is true elsewhere.

The lawyer whose identity rests upon remembering precedent should probably be concerned about a machine capable of retrieving every relevant case in seconds. But perhaps the lawyer's deeper value was never remembering precedent. It was understanding what that precedent means for this human being, in this circumstance, facing this consequence.

The professor who defines teaching as transmitting information faces extraordinary competition from AI. But perhaps education was never fundamentally about transferring information. Perhaps it was about awakening curiosity.

- The strategist cannot rely merely upon assembling slides. The
- programmer cannot assume that writing syntax is the
- permanent source of economic value.

The writer cannot assume that arranging beautiful sentences is uniquely human.

- Every profession is approaching the same uncomfortable
- frontier:

When the task becomes cheap, what remains valuable?

Perhaps the answer is: Questions. Judgment. Context. Meaning. Imagination. Courage. Empathy. Purpose.

And the ability to decide what all this extraordinary intelligence should actually be used for.

The Most Valuable Person in the Room May No Longer Be the One With the Answers

For centuries, expertise meant possessing answers. AI changes that equation. When answers become abundant, the scarce commodity becomes something else. The ability to formulate the right question. The ability to recognize context. The ability to detect when an answer rests upon a false assumption. The ability to integrate conflicting truths. The ability to understand consequence.

The ability to say: “I don't know, but I know how we can find out.”

- That may become one of the most powerful expressions of
- expertise in the twenty-first century. Because confidence is not
- certainty. Confidence is the capacity to move intelligently
- through uncertainty.

My patient did not need me to pretend that I knew everything. He needed me to be sufficiently secure in what I knew that I was unafraid of discovering what I did not.

The insecure professional experiences AI as humiliation: The machine knows something I don't.

The secure professional experiences exactly the same event as possibility: Excellent. Now I have access to something I didn't know.

One protects identity. The other expands capability.

Your Reach Should Not End Where Your Body Ends

There is a peculiar limitation built into transactional existence. Your influence ends when the transaction ends.

- The patient leaves. The client leaves. The meeting concludes.
- Eventually the career ends. Eventually the title disappears.
- Eventually somebody else occupies the office.
- If your value exists primarily in the things you personally do, your
- impact remains constrained by the physical limits of your
- existence.

But ideas behave differently. Vision behaves differently. Purpose behaves differently. A powerful idea can enter another human being and continue working when you are no longer in the room.

A teacher's greatest accomplishment is not what the teacher knows. It is what the student becomes.

- A physician's greatest accomplishment is not how many facts
- the physician remembers. It is what becomes possible in
- another human being because the physician was there.

A leader's greatest accomplishment is not how many people report to them. It is how many people become larger because that leader existed in their lives.

That is an expansive definition of being. And suddenly AI looks much less threatening. It becomes leverage.

AI May Be a Mirror Before It Becomes a Master

Perhaps that is artificial intelligence's first great contribution to humanity. Not replacing us. Revealing us. It is holding up a mirror and forcing us to ask questions industrial society allowed us to postpone.

Who am I when my title is removed? What am I worth when information is free? What do I contribute when competence becomes abundant? What can I see that others cannot yet see? What can I create that does not yet exist? Whose life becomes larger because I was here? And what purpose does my life serve beyond maintaining the machinery of my own existence?

Those are not technological questions. They are human ones. No algorithm can answer them for us. And perhaps this is why the question of agency matters so much. If we surrender agency to artificial intelligence, we may gain extraordinary efficiency while losing something far more consequential: the responsibility to decide what our intelligence is for.

The Future May Belong to Those Who Become More Human

For centuries, humans have competed by behaving increasingly like efficient machines. We standardized work. Measured output. Optimized productivity. Reduced expertise into repeatable processes. Then we finally built machines capable of doing those things extraordinarily well. And now we are surprised that they compete with us. Perhaps the answer is not to become better machines.

Perhaps the answer is to become more completely human. More curious. More imaginative. More courageous. More compassionate. More capable of judgment. More comfortable with uncertainty. More willing to create meaning where none previously existed. And above all, more anchored in a purpose larger than ourselves.

- A microscope did not diminish the scientist. A telescope did not
- diminish the astronomer. A calculator did not diminish the
- mathematician. They expanded the frontier of what human
- beings could attempt.

Artificial intelligence may do the same, but on a scale we have never experienced.

- That afternoon in my office, the machines helped us find
- information. But information was never the destination. A
- frightened man needed clarity. Clarity restored confidence.
- Confidence restored agency. And agency allowed him once
- again to become an active participant in his own future.
- So perhaps we are asking the wrong question when we ask:
- “How long before AI can do what I do?”
- The better questions are: “Have I defined what I do too
- narrowly?”
- And beyond that: “What will I do with the extraordinary

- intelligence that has suddenly become available to me?”

Because the great divide of the AI age may ultimately not be between humans and machines. It may be between human beings who surrender their agency to machines, and those who use machines to expand it.

Between those who define themselves by the tasks they perform, and those who understand the purpose those tasks were meant to serve. Between people frightened because the machine can think, and people secure enough to ask: What should we think about next?

Mira Murati is trying to answer that question from the frontier of artificial intelligence . A few days ago, I encountered it from the other side of a physician's desk.

Perhaps we arrived at the same place.

The future of AI should not be about making human beings unnecessary. It should be about making human possibility larger. And therein may lie the real challenge of artificial intelligence. Not whether machines will become more like us. But whether their arrival will finally force us to discover what it means to be fully human.

- — Dr. Ravi R. Iyer
- Boardroom Reflections

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ravi R. Iyer, MD, is a physician-scientist, entrepreneur, author, and 5x TEDx speaker who has spent four decades exploring a

deceptively simple question: What makes human beings, and the organizations they create, perform at their best? A Harvard-trained physician, corporate strategist, and the founder of multiple healthcare and performance ventures, he is the creator of Neuroalignment, a framework for building high-performance organizations around the realities of human cognitive diversity. His work sits at the intersection of biology, leadership, technology, and human behavior. Boardroom Reflections is where those worlds meet.

THE AKAASHIK RECORD

A permanent, complete and unedited register of the writing and public work of Ravi R. Iyer, MD. Each entry records where the work first appeared, when, and at what address, so that the record stands independently of any platform that carries it. Entries are never removed. © Ravi R. Iyer, MD. Recorded by arrangement with the original publisher; all rights in the original publication remain with its owner.

Name forms. One person, credited as Ravi R. Iyer, MD; Ravi R. Iyer; Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer, MD; Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer; Ravi Iyer, MD; Ravi Iyer; Ravi Ramamoorthy; R. R. Iyer; R.R. Iyer; R. Iyer. The author’s name is Ravi Iyer, and has been for many years. His work is nonetheless credited under several forms. In India the canonical surname is Ramamoorthy and Iyer is the clan name appended to it, and where a form is entered under that convention the credit follows it: on the signed speaker release for TEDxChantilly he entered Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer, and that talk stands credited on the TEDx channel to Ravi Ramamoorthy. The five ted.com event pages credit him under four different forms between them — Dr. Ravi Iyer at TEDxGary, Dr. Ravi Iyer, MD at TEDxHandley Blvd Women, R.R. Iyer at TEDxUMKC, and Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer at both TEDxMontgomery College and TEDxChantilly HS. The Record lists every form the work is credited under, so that it remains findable under each.